

Movies worth watching:

Invictus (2009) this film directed by Clint Eastwood captures the inspiring character and leadership of Nelson Mandela played by Morgan Freeman who after 24 years of breaking rocks in prison and sleeping on the prison floor assumes leadership of the nation that jailed him. Nelson Mandela is one of the world's great men who in the words of Roger Ebert, "here waited in faith for his rendezvous with history.... His personal forgiveness of white South Africa was the beacon that illuminated that nation's Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, one of the very few examples in history of people who really had much to forgive, and forgave it". Though the movie centers on Mandela's early time in office and his insistence to support the South African Rugby Team it still effectively shows us the Mandela who was determined to overcome racism and lead by example. His first term decision not take the Rugby icon "away from the Whites" so that what they feared about black rule came true demonstrated to South Africa and the world that this man was greater than the racism; greater than hatred. Once again Clint Eastwood shows us he is a master storyteller. Well worth watching.

Rendition [2007]; Rendition is the CIA policy whereby people who are suspected for any reason of being terrorists can be snatched from their lives and transported to another country to be held without charge and tortured for information. Because the torture is conducted by professionals in those countries, CIA and US government officials can publicly state that "America does not torture." This practice, known as an "extraordinary rendition," was authorized under the Clinton administration and after 9/11, the Bush administration used it frequently.

Roger Ebert writes: Director Gavin Hood's terrifying, intelligent thriller "Rendition" puts a human face on the practice.. What the film documents is that we [US government and CIA] have lost faith in due process and the rule of law, and have forfeited the moral high ground... Gavin Hood, the South African-born director of "Rendition," first came into wide view with the wonderful "Tsotsi" (2005), which won the Academy Award for best foreign film. Now comes this big, confident, effective thriller with its politics so seamlessly a part of its story...A film like "Rendition" is valuable and rare... "It is a movie about the theory and practice of two things: torture and personal responsibility. And it is wise about what is right, and what is wrong."

Taking Chance (2009 HBO) is a 2009 historical drama based upon the experiences of Lt. Col. Michael Strobl (Kevin Bacon) escorting the body of a Marine killed in Iraq, PFC Chance Phelps (posthumously promoted to LCpl), back to his hometown in Wyoming. From Dover to Philadelphia by hearse, from there to Minneapolis and on to Billings by plane, and then by car to Phelps' Wyoming home - person after person pays respects. Kind words, small gifts, and gratitude are given Strobl to deliver to the family. USA Today, said "A small, almost perfectly realized gem of a movie. The film was the most-watched HBO original in five years, with over two million viewers on the opening night, and more than 5.5 million on re-airings. Critics often attribute this success to its apolitical nature, not directly depicting nor offering an opinion of the Iraq War. The film essentially follows the coffin from place to place. There is little dialogue, very little back story – and the film is surprisingly engaging and moving to watch. Unlike any other film experience I've seen recently.

The Lucky Ones (2008 “R”). This movie is about three US soldiers home from Iraq on a month’s leave. They don’t know one another prior to finding themselves on the same plane from Iraq to New York. Once back in the States their lives and stateside stories become intertwined as they end up travelling together to their separate “destinies”. What could have been a bad road movie has surprising emotional impact as you see the personal cost to individuals who go to war and the families good and bad who stay behind. [Tim Robbins](#) plays the father figure, a fiftysomething career Army sergeant who received a back injury and is returning home to St. Louis. [Rachel McAdams](#) plays Pvt. Colee Dunn, who has a leg injury and is heading for Vegas to return a guitar belonging to her boyfriend, who was killed in the war. [Michael Pena](#) plays Sgt. T.K. Poole, injured by shrapnel in the groin, who wants to go to Vegas to find hookers who can reawaken his equipment before he meets his stateside girlfriend. Though the film focuses more on the personalities of the three and their own stories, you end up caring for each of these three and become intrigued with the three-way relationship and caring that develops when they “have no one else to turn to”. I think this is very good story telling.

Flash of Genius (PG-13; 2008). The docudrama recounts the true story of a mechanical engineer, Robert Kearns, a decent thought unremarkable family man who in a flash of genius invented the intermittent windshield wiper only to have his working model and 1967 patent ripped off by Ford Motor Company. Though offered \$30 million settlement by Ford in lieu of admitting any wrong doing Kearns refuses to let Ford “get away with it” and takes the company to court in 1982 representing himself. The movie raises the question of whether the pursuit of justice is worth the cost—Kearns is obsessive with his ethics; he alienates his family, angers his business partners and is “fired” by the only lawyer to take his case seriously. Roger Ebert asks the question in viewing the movie, “Why do corporations tend to be greedy?.. Why not just pay the guy royalties? Simple: Because Ford thought it could get away with it. He was only a college professor. They had teams of high-priced lawyers with infinite patience. They risked having the legal fees cost them more than the patent rights, but what the hell. You can't go around encouraging these pipsqueaks.”

The Stoning of Soraya M. This movie dramatically captures the true story of a 1986 stoning of a woman in Iran who was falsely accused of committing adultery by her husband who wanted to marry another woman. The movie is based on the bestselling book by French journalist Freidoune Sahebjam’s best-selling *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (1994). **Roger Ebert writes** (June 24, 2009) *The stoning sequence itself is one of the most unbearable experiences I have had at the movies...it lasts nearly 20 minutes...Soraya is buried in a hole up to the waist..The message is that if a religion requires practices that seem evil to its members, they should resign from that religion. If it condones a death penalty that is visited unequally on members of a specific gender, race or class, it is immoral. There cannot be a reward for following it blindly, because only a thoughtful choice has meaning. At heaven’s gate you cannot say, “I always followed the herd.”...I recommend it if only for its brutal ideological message.*

Frozen River (2008) **Roger Ebert writes that Frozen River** is the story of two lives in economic emergency, and two women, one white (Ray) and one aboriginal (Lila), ([Melissa Leo](#) and Misty Upham) as mothers who live without male support in shabby house trailers on the U.S.-Quebec border: Mohawk territory. “Frozen River,” a debut film written and directed by Courtney Hunt, never steps wrong. It resists all temptations to turn this plot into some kind of a thriller and keeps it grounded on the struggle for economic survival. Lila knows a smuggler who will give her \$2,000 for smuggling aliens across the border into the United States. This involves the two women making hazardous car trips across the ice of a frozen river, dealing with unsavory types on both sides, and carrying Chinese and Pakistanis in the trunk. The winner of the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance 2008, “Frozen River” is one of those rare independent films

that knows precisely what it intends, and what the meaning of the story is. It doesn't play sides. It isn't about illegal aliens or smuggling. It's about two brave women doing what they have to do to survive. That it climaxes on Christmas Eve doesn't even seem contrived, just sad.

The Visitor (2008) written and directed by Thomas McCarthy, this film was given 96% approval by the Rotten Tomato top critics. In this film Richard Jenkins plays a 60ish burnt out professor who cares little about his career and less for life since the passing of his wife. In a trip to New York from Connecticut to present an academic paper, Professor Walter Vale (Jenkins) has the surprise of his life which eventually leads to his "resurrection"—a resurgence of life that comes from a surprising angle.

As Roger Ebert notes, this film is about a great deal more than Professor Vale—it is about illegal U.S. residents and stupid bureaucrats and deportations and drums and love and loss. "This is a wonderful film, sad, angry, and without a comforting little happy ending. ... the whole point of serious fiction is to show people changing, and how they change in "The Visitor" is the film's beauty. So much goes unsaid, and unseen. ... We are left to listen to the silences and observe the spaces."

Those who like action movies will likely fall asleep in *The Visitor*, but those who find personal transformation, deep feelings, life stress the stuff of great stories will find *The Visitor* one of the best movies of 2008.

The Insider" How hard is it to tell the truth when big business wants you silent? What does it cost to be a whistle blower? This outstanding movie tells the inside true story of how big tobacco's long-running tissue of lies was finally exposed by investigative journalism. **Michael Mann's "The Insider"** (1999 with seven academy award nominations)with Al Pacino, Russell Crowe, and Christopher Plummer makes a great thriller and expose. At its center stands Lowell Bergman, a producer for "60 Minutes," the CBS News program where a former tobacco scientist named Jeffrey Wigand spilled the beans. First Bergman coaxes Wigand to talk. Then he works with reporter Mike Wallace to get the story. Then he battles with CBS executives who are afraid to run it--because a lawsuit could destroy the network. He's a modern investigative hero, Woodward and Bernstein rolled into one.

Or so the film tells it. The film is accurate in its broad strokes. Wigand did indeed reveal secrets from the Brown & Williamson laboratories that eventually led to a \$246 billion settlement of suits brought against the tobacco industry by all 50 states. "60 Minutes" did eventually air the story, after delays and soul-searching. And reporting by the Wall Street Journal was instrumental in easing the network's decision to air the piece. (Roger Ebert)

Border Town: Written and directed by Gregory Nava (*El Norte*, *Frida*, *Selena*), ***Bordertown* (2007)** is a devastating, emotionally charged fact-based drama touching on the rapes, murders and disappearances of thousands of Mexican women factory workers in the multinational maquiladores factories lining the border between Mexico and the United States. The virtual labor camp fortresses that sprung up in the 1990s in the wake of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) economically thrive off the absence of tariffs and humane working conditions.

Jennifer Lopez was awarded the Artists for Amnesty Award by Amnesty International for Bordertown, which she also produced. Present at the Amnesty ceremony this year at the Berlin Film Festival, was Norma Andrade, whose seventeen-year-old daughter was found murdered in Juarez in February 2001. Andrade has since co-founded Our Daughters Back Home (Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa), a legal support group for the parents of these young victims.

Mike Nichols – Pastor, Capilano Christian Community